

CULINARY MAP: JACKSONVILLE

Big Appetites Required in and around JAX

SAN MARCO

BISTRO AIX

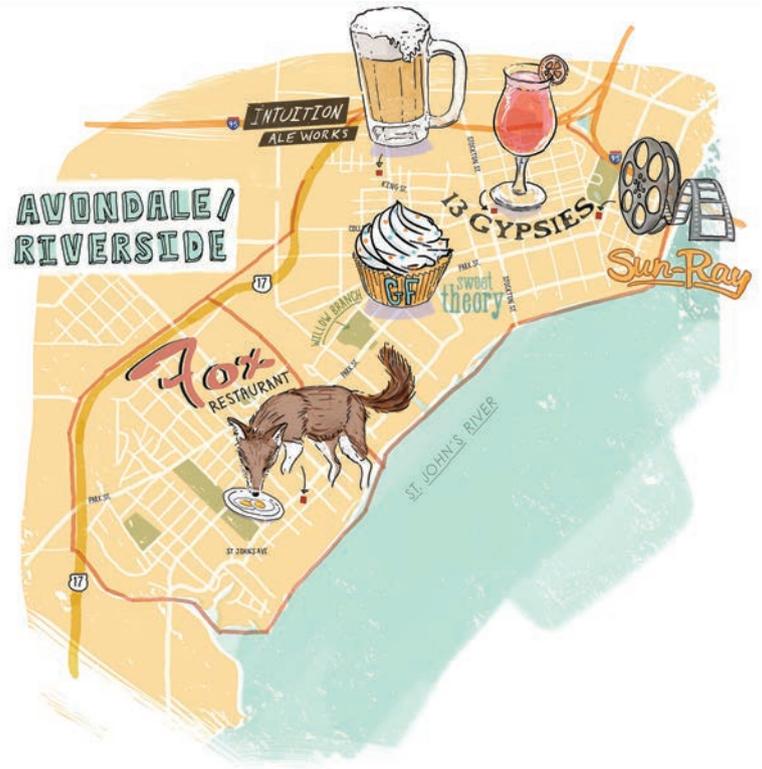
Even though **Chef Tom Gray** (now at Moxie Kitchen + Cocktails) is credited with bringing this bustling **French bistro** to new culinary heights, the superb service and food remain despite his departure (and he's the first one to tell you to dine there now!). Named after the charming South of France city Aix-en-Provence, French traditional dishes like steak frites are complemented by a **lobster BLT on fabulous sourdough** and richly delicious **braised oxtail with pappardelle and Tuscan kale**. bistrox.com

TAVERNA

In **San Marco**, find this absolute jewel of a restaurant. Husband and wife co-owners Kiley and Sam Efron are responsible for the fantastic wine selection and deeply flavorful food, respectively. While waiting for their full liquor license to kick in (it did in late 2013), Kiley developed a wine cocktail menu comprised of inspired, tempting tipples. Chef Sam's cuisine is influenced by both Spain and Italy. The **herbed ricotta** and **sautéed calamari** make nice precursors to a **Neapolitan pizza**. tavernasanmarco.com

SOUTHERN ART

The **Parlour Speakeasy** at **Grape & Grain Exchange** behind this very well-stocked and well-priced liquor store is a true speakeasy, the only of its sort in all of Jacksonville. The bar itself is difficult to locate, but when you do, you'll find that they are too busy perfecting **the art of the craft cocktail** to be worried about luring you in the door. Live music is often exceptional in this intimate space. Don't forget to make your appointment! grapeandgrainexchange.com



AVONDALE / RIVERSIDE

SWEET THEORY

One bite of a **So Fudging Good cupcake** and you will have no idea that this timelessly adorable bakery makes only **vegan treats**. Their (freely shared) secret is coconut oil, and their richly satisfying doughnuts, whoopee pies, and hunks of sweet breads leave you head-scratchingly marveling: "No eggs? How the...?" **Gluten-free options abound**, but for wheat lovers they sell breads from the wonderful gals at **Community Loaves**. facebook.com/SweetRevolutionBakingCo, 904-387-1001

SUN-RAY CINEMA

Resisting the allure of this adorable throwback cinema would be as impossible as resisting one of their smile-inducing menu items. If your (rather dud of a) date suggests you steer clear of "Ohh That Smelly Pie" (pizza with sauerkraut and Swiss), then go for a **Wildly Inauthentic Cuban** or a **kimchi-topped hot dog** instead—and enjoy with draft beer or wine. The usual suspects of popcorn, soda, and (local) candy are available for a more traditional experience. sunraycinema.com

INTUITION ALE WORKS

Who needs food when there are so many **craft beers** to sample at this hard-to-find **brewery and tap room**? The chalkboard describes daily selections, and the friendly staff will cheerfully expound, making for a near-perfect pour every time. Just don't become attached to any one selection—many of the beers they offer are small batch and not available in retail outlets, so enjoy while you can! intuitionaleworks.com

13 GYPSIES

At this tiny tapas restaurant a few doors down from Bold Bean coffee (post-lunch coffee jolt might be required), the **handmade chorizo with dates and pears** and curried cauliflower are not to be missed. Move onto a mushroom melt sandwich with fontina and roasted peppers, a **Genoa salami crêpe**, or just stick with tapas. If the latter, a second round should include the empanada of the day, prosciutto royale, and garlic shrimp. 13gypsies.com

FOX RESTAURANT

At this old-school diner, **omelettes** are large, a **short stack** is always recommended, and a side of bacon is at least four slices (we eschew places offering a measly two). The lunch menu offers reliable classics like chicken salad and Reubens, but we are partial to their Southern twist on the **BLT**—featuring **fried green tomatoes, bleu cheese, and horseradish**. But why lunch? At this diner, breakfast is served all day. [904-387-2669](tel:904-387-2669)

JAX BEACH

ANGIE'S SUBS

It's a casual local sandwich shop whose motto seems to be: we do our own thing, and if you're not into it, that's cool, but don't stick around to kill our B. The cheerful teenagers taking counter service orders may not know how to describe the secret Peruvian sauce responsible for their #1 sandwich seller (aptly named **The Peruvian**) but will enthusiastically offer you a taste. FYI kids: **honey mustard with a kick** will suffice as a descriptor. A beach institution, go for lunch. [904-246-2519](tel:904-246-2519)

THE SALTY FIG // THE BLIND RABBIT

Keep conversation light because when the gorgonzola chips arrive at the table, all communication will halt as the hoovering of **crunchy gooey potato chip fondue nachos** begins. The **cast iron blue crab mac and cheese with truffled crust** will disappear before the burgers arrive at either the beachy Rabbit or the urban Fig. Plenty of **whiskey**, plenty of moonshine, and the best fries in JAX...all in two sleek locales belying the food truck origins of these resto brainchildren. theblindfig.com

TACOLU

Our favorite beachy Mexican hotspot is included here because their **Day of the Dead décor** deserves to be celebrated! For more on TacoLu, check out **Culinary Concierge** (page 42) and **Amuse** (page 50). tacolu.com

OFF THE MAP

BOWL OF PHO

When a **Vietnamese restaurant** in a strip mall has a thirty-minute wait midmorning on a Sunday, you know you are in for some pho-tastic food. Indeed you are. Excellent service, excellent **peanut sauce**, and excellent curry. But the title is not just for show, people: what you really need to order is a **bowl of pho**. Large portions with flavorful broth and all of the fixings a pho aficionado could want. [904-646-4455](tel:904-646-4455)



PICASSO'S

The allure is not just that the food is art at this restaurant offering arguably the best pies in the Jacksonville area—though those pizzas sure are good looking. It's also that we seriously dig their commitment to **local ingredients**, to delicious, straightforward food, and to making every patron feel welcome. Oh, and we also dig the fried mac and cheese and the **Meatball Madness pizza**. jaxpicassos.com

DOS GATOS

Near the riverfront in the heart of downtown is this speakeasy-esque venue that is *the* place for **late-night drinks**. The twenty questions routine at the door imparts an air of exclusivity to what lies ahead, but inside the cavernous cocktail lounge, people of all walks are mingling, drinking, singing karaoke, participating in trivia, and—depending on how many **Red Dawns** they've experienced—might be wondering why the bartender is dressed like a cat. dosgatosjax.com

MOXIE KITCHEN + COCKTAILS

The space is gorgeously detailed: reclaimed wood, “leather strap” light fixtures, mural by a local artist, hand-stamped restroom walls, a pristine open kitchen, and dual dining levels each boasting a patio. Snag a seat in the back banquette of the upstairs bar that's swaddled in fur, and you might never leave. **Chef Tom Gray** is one of Jacksonville's culinary superstars. While the restaurant is named after his beloved soft drink, his **octopus with Kalamata olive chips** and his **sweet(bread)** take on **chicken wings** show he's got moxie all right. moxiefl.com